

Eternal Investment: From the Body to the Body

I Corinthians 12:12-31
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Pastor Craig Watson
Ypsilanti Free Methodist Church

A few weeks ago, there was a news story about the last remaining survivor from the Titanic. It seems that Millvina Dean, a 96-year-old resident of Southampton, England is now selling some of the artifacts from her historic rescue in order to pay for her nursing home costs. Mrs. Dean was only 2-months old when she was wrapped in a sack and escaped the sinking ship on a lifeboat together with her mother and brother. Her story has stirred a lot of renewed interest in the events of that fateful night in April 1912. Many have hailed her a hero simply because of her survival.

There were many heroes the night the Titanic went down. Most of their stories are lost forever. However, there is the story of one hero that I'd like to share with you. It is the story about a man named John Harper. John Harper was a passenger on the Titanic together with his six-year-old daughter Nanna. On the night the Titanic struck the iceberg, when it became evident that the ship was going down, John Harper took his daughter to the deck and placed her into one of the lifeboats. He knew that it was likely he would not survive the night, but as he kissed his daughter goodbye, he told her he would see her again. Then, as John Harper helped the ship's crewman get others into the lifeboats, it is reported that he began calling out, "Women and children and the unsaved into the lifeboats."

After the ship sank and John Harper found himself in the icy north Atlantic waters, it is reported that he swam from person to person in the water, asking them if they were saved – if they had put their faith in Jesus Christ as their savior. When he approached one young man and tried to lead him to Christ, the young man pushed him away, not wanting to hear what he thought were mere religious ramblings. John Harper, rather than giving up, took off his life jacket and tossed it to the young man, saying, "Here, then, you need this more than I do." With that John Harper swam away to speak with some others. However, shortly before the cold and fatigue took its final toll on him, John Harper returned to the young man and this time led him to Christ.

Of the over 1,500 people who were thrown into the water that night, there were only a handful that survived. That young man was one of them. Four years later at a Titanic survivors' meeting, that young man stood up and tearfully shared how John Harper had twice-saved his life:

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First, by giving up his life jacket and second by introducing him to the Savior. He shared how John Harper's final words to him before Harper went under for the last time had been the most important words this young man had ever heard: "Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

If you have watched the movie about the Titanic or read accounts, you know that there were many people trying to buy their way or force their way onto the lifeboats. They were thinking only of their own survival. But John Harper was thinking of the needs of others, willing to sacrifice his own life.

Now, you may be wondering about what other stories that fateful night produced. But the question that really sticks in my mind is this: What kind of church produced a man like John Harper? What kind of church taught and nurtured the man who selflessly lived out the Christian life to the very end? Whatever church it was, I want to be a part of that kind of church! I want to be a part of a church where the most important thing on the minds of its members is the welfare of others – both their eternal welfare as well as their current, everyday needs. I want to be a part of a church where the compassion of Christ is lived out in a tangible way every single day! I want to be a part of a church where joy abounds because Jesus is living and evident in the hearts of the members! I want to be a part of that church!

That church is a connected church. That church is a vibrant church. That church is a diverse church. That church is a community of believers where, though the members are all unique and have different personalities, gifts and abilities, they are still one body. That church is what Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to aspire to in I Corinthians 12:12-31.

¹²The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

¹⁴Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

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²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And now I will show you the most excellent way.

Many Parts, Many Functions (I Cor. 12:12-13,27-31)

Using the illustration of the body, Paul was explaining to the Corinthians that, just as the body has many different parts that together form one body, so the Church – the Body of Christ – is made up of many different members who come together to form one church. It is good for us to remember this about our local church. Each member of our church is unique. Each is different and has many different talents and abilities. Each contributes to the church in his or her own special way.

There are many blessings in being unique. We do not all need to have the same talents, abilities, interests, personalities, or temperaments. In fact, it would be downright boring if we did! We actually complement one another in our differences.

Part of our uniqueness includes our function within the Body of Christ. Each of us has a different purpose, if you will. One of my primary functions includes what I am doing right now: presenting the word of God to you through this sermon. Another way I function within the Church is through listening to people. Sometimes people just need to be heard, and God has given me the ability to be an empathetic listener. Your functions may be totally different than mine, but you also have many functions within the Church body.

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Let me illustrate it another way, one similar to Paul's illustration. Your body is made up of many parts that each function in unique ways. In fact, if you are an adult of average weight, here is what your body accomplishes in a 24 hour period:

- Your heart beats 103,689 times
- Your blood travels 168,000,000 miles
- You breathe 23,040 times
- You inhale 438 cubic feet of air
- You eat 3.25 pounds of food
- You drink 2.9 quarts of liquids
- You lose 7/8 pounds of waste
- You speak 4,800 words
- You move 750 muscles
- Your nails grow a few thousandths of an inch
- Your hair grows a little over a hundredth of an inch
- You exercise 7,000,000 brain cells

These are all *functions* of your body. Can you name all of the body *parts* that are involved in each of these functions? Neither can I! The point is that the various parts of the body work together – often at different points in the function and with their activities not directly connected – in order to accomplish these feats.

In the Body of Christ – in the Church – the same is true. You and I are involved in various activities and with various people, often unaware of what each other are doing or how our activities may somehow be connected in fulfilling certain functions. Nonetheless, we *are* connected through our common affiliation with the church *and* through our unique functions! In verses 27-30 of I Corinthians 12, Paul points this out. He states that God has given different people to the church with different functions and that we do not all share the same roles. There is a reason for this. Through God's grace we minister to one another.

Every believer in Jesus Christ is a minister. It comes with the commitment we make to Christ and with the fact that He comes into our lives and serves as our Lord and Guide. The ministry Christ wants to do in each of our lives he does *through* other believers! This is what Paul was talking about in Ephesians 4 when he wrote:

⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...

¹¹It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all

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reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

~ Ephesians 4:7,11-13 (NIV)

God uses each of us in our uniqueness to meet the needs of one another. This also reminds us that, within the Church body, there are...

Many Parts, Many Needs (I Cor. 12:14-25)

Whether we like it or not, we *need* each other! For the Church body to survive, we *need* each other! For each individual within the church to survive, we *need* each other! Again, the human body serves as an illustration of this. It is a fact that every part of the body is connected to the body or it dies. If you cut off a finger and it is not reattached to the hand in a reasonable amount of time, that finger will die. It will cease to be viable on its own. Without blood pumping through it, providing oxygen to the tissue, it will eventually shrivel up. Without the muscles and tendons being connected to the hand and the nerves connected to the rest of the central nervous system, it will cease to move. Left on its own, the finger will lose all manner of life.

Likewise, in the Church, every part of the Body is **connected** to the Body or it dies. Some people don't get this. They think the Church is just an option in the Christian life. But Jesus never established the Church to be a bunch of individuals who happen to believe in Him. He established the Church to be a *Body* of believers!

In Genesis 1:27, we are told that we are created in the image of God. Part of that image is our ability to be both distinctly unique yet unexplainably connected to one another, similar to how the members of the Trinity are unique yet inseparable. One of the greatest mysteries about God is that God is three-in-one: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity has always functioned as both unique in form yet one in substance. In other words, while each member of the Trinity has their own separate personality, they are still somehow one in who they are – together, they *are* God. While each may function separately – for example, Jesus came and died on the cross for our sin and the Holy Spirit remains with us now abiding in our hearts – they still are inseparable in substance. That is why Jesus said in John 10:30 that the Father and He were one. That is also how we as individuals made in the image of God are also members of the Body of Christ, connected to and needing one another.

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Every part needs the other parts to both survive and *thrive*. Paul explained this in his illustration in I Corinthians 12:15-25. He stated that one part cannot say that they do not need the others, because they could not survive without the others. Likewise, in order for parts of the body to ultimately fulfill their purpose, they needed each other. Paul's point was that in order for us just to function, we *need* each other. More so, to reach our fullest potential we *need* each other. As the church, to accomplish our corporate goals, we *need* each other.

Imagine for a moment that you were going to build a building. Now first, imagine trying to build it alone. Most of us would immediately lack the many skills required to do all the work, let alone the strength and stamina to accomplish such a feat. Is it likely that you could build a building all by yourself? Probably not.

Now imagine you are joined by ten more people, but all of you have the same single talent or ability. Knowing how diverse the needs are in order to build, is it likely that the group of you could accomplish your task? Again, probably not.

Imagine, next, that you are joined by two hundred others, representing dozens of different skills and abilities (i.e., carpentry, masonry, electricians, drywallers, etc.). How much greater are the chances now that you will be able to construct the building? Much better!

Do you get the picture? Within the Church, there are many needs. However, God in His infinite wisdom has provided many unique people with a variety of gifts and abilities. As we work together, combining our various talents and skills, we meet one another's needs. And, yes, *you* are needed to do this! How you contribute should be determined by how God made you, but you *are* needed.

As the Church, the Body of Christ, it is great to see the ministries of the Church flourish. Last week, we got a wonderful picture of what is happening in our Children's Ministries. Today, we got a snapshot of what's happening with our Youth. Yesterday, our Men's Ministry organized a day to take care of several needs around the church building. A couple weeks ago, we heard about how our Small Groups Ministry is continuing to help people get connected with others and grow in their walk with Christ. These are only a few of the many ministries going on every week and all of you are the reasons why these ministries both exist and flourish. Even so, with all of these many parts, it is good to remember that we still are all focused on one purpose.

Many Parts, One Purpose

This past Tuesday, we held our presidential election to fill the highest office in the land. Before long, we will hear reports of who will fill the various cabinet positions under the new president. Each of those individuals will be expected to be loyal to the one who has appointed them and as a result, there is a phrase that has commonly been used by those who work in or directly with the White House. That phrase is, “I serve at the pleasure of the President.”

Now, you and I are not serving at the White House nor do any of us have any direct appointment from the President – at least, none that I know of! But, there is a Ruler from whom we have received a direct appointment. He is the Savior who gave His life for us and who now rules and reigns forever. While some in Washington may soon be expressing their loyalty to a new president, followers of Jesus Christ are called upon to show their loyalty to the Lord. How blessed we are to be able to declare today, “I serve at the pleasure of the King of Kings!” This being said, we exist to fulfill His “orders” and to do His bidding.

In Matthew 28:18-20, more so than probably any other single passage of Scripture, we find our – the Church’s - singular, three-fold purpose.

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Our singular, three-fold purpose is, first, to *go and make disciples*. This means **leading** others to Christ. That is the first function of the Body of Christ. What your part in that and what my part in that is will probably vary from one person to the next. But we *all* play a part in that purpose.

The second aspect of our three-fold purpose is in *baptizing them* – those whom we have introduced to Christ. In doing so, we are **accepting** others into the Body of Christ as they make an outward proclamation of their new-found faith.

Thirdly, we are to be *teaching them*. Thus, we are **helping** others to grow in their relationship with Christ. All three of these are part of our singular purpose to “serve at the pleasure of the King of Kings!” Therefore, It is not about *ME*... It is all about *HIM (JESUS)*, and *THE LOST* (those who do not know Jesus as Lord), and *US* (The Church, The Body of Christ).

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We fulfill our purpose as together we “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

Picture our church for a moment. We have “many parts,” – many different people – with “many functions” that we work together to accomplish. We have “many parts” – many different people – with “many needs” that we are called on by our Lord to try and meet. And, we have “many parts” – many different people – but one Biblical purpose: “to serve at the pleasure of the King of Kings.”

Now, continue to picture our church but with one significant change: Every part – every single person who is a part of this body – has a heart like John Harper, the man from the Titanic that I told you about at the beginning of this message. How would that change our church? What if *you* had a heart like John Harper – willing to give your very life to faithfully “serve at the pleasure of the King of Kings”? How would that change you?

Do you have such a heart? You can ask the Lord for one today. He is in the heart-transformation business! What about our church? Do we have such a heart? We can. Let’s ask the Lord for such a heart right now.